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THE MAN IN THE BOWLER HAT

A TERRIBLY EXCITING AFFAIR

BY

A. A. MILNE

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THE MAN IN THE BOWLER HAT

CHARACTERS

JOHN
MARY
HERO
HEROINE
CHIEF VILLAIN
BAD MAN

The Man In The Bowler Hat

The Scene is MARY'S *sitting room—the most ordinary sitting room in the world.* JOHN *and* MARY, *two of the most ordinary people, he in the early forties, she in the late thirties, are sitting in front of the fire after dinner. He, as usual, is reading the paper; she, as usual, is knitting. They talk in a desultory way.*

MARY. Did I tell you that Mrs. Patchett has just had another baby?

JOHN. *(Not looking up from his paper)* Yes, dear, you told me.

MARY. Did I? Are you sure?

JOHN. Last week.

MARY. But she only had it yesterday. Mr. Patchett told me this morning when I was ordering the cauliflower.

JOHN. Ah! Then perhaps you told me she was going to have one.

MARY. Yes, I think that must have been it.

JOHN. This is the one that she was going to have?

MARY. It weighed seven pounds exactly.

JOHN. Of course, being a grocer, he would have the scales ready. Boy or girl?

MARY. Boy.

JOHN. The first boy, isn't it?

MARY. The second.

JOHN. *(Sticking to it)* The first one that weighed seven pounds exactly.

(They are silent again—he reading, she knitting.)

MARY. Anything in the paper tonight?

JOHN. *(Turning over the paper)* A threatened strike of boiler-makers.

MARY. Does that matter very much?

JOHN. It says here that the situation is extremely serious.

MARY. Tell me about it.

JOHN. *(Not very good at it)* Well, the—er—boiler-makers are threatening to strike. *(Weightily)* They are threatening not to make any more—er—boilers.

MARY. Kitchen boilers?

JOHN. *(With an explanatory* gesture) Boilers. They are threatening not to make any more of them. And—well—that's how it is. *(Returning to his paper)* The situation is extremely serious. Exciting scenes have been witnessed.

MARY. What sort of scenes?

JOHN. Well, naturally, when you have a lot of men threatening not to make any more boilers . . . and—er—a lot of other men threatening that if they *don't* make any—well, exciting scenes are witnessed. *Have* been witnessed by this man, this special correspondent.

MARY. *(After a pause)* It's a funny thing that nothing exciting ever happens to *us.*

JOHN. It depends what you mean by exciting. I went round in 95 last Saturday—as I think I told you.

MARY. Yes, but I mean something really thrilling—and dangerous. Like a novel—or on the stage.

JOHN. My dear Mary, nothing like that ever happens in real life. I mean it wouldn't happen to *us.*

MARY. Would you like it if it did?

(He says nothing for a moment. Then he puts down his paper, and sits there, thinking. At last he turns to her.)

JOHN. *(Almost shyly)* I used to imagine things like

that happening. Years ago. Rescuing a beautiful maiden and—and all that sort of thing. And being wrecked on a desert island with her. . . . *(He turns away from her, staring into his dreams)* Or pushing open a little green door in a long high wall, and finding myself in a wonderful garden under the bluest of blue skies, and waiting, waiting . . . for something. . . .

MARY. I used to imagine things too. People fighting duels because of me. . . . Silly, isn't it? Nothing ever really happens like that.

JOHN. *(Still with his thoughts)* No. . . .

(At this moment a STRANGE MAN *comes in. Contrary to all etiquette, he is wearing a Bowler Hat and an overcoat, and has a half-smoked cigar in his mouth. He walks quickly across the room and sits down in a chair with his back to the audience.* JOHN *and* MARY, *deep in their thoughts, do not notice him.)*

MARY. *(Looking into the fire)* I suppose we're too old for it now.

JOHN. I suppose so.

MARY. If it had only happened once—just for the memories.

JOHN. So that we could say to each other— Good lord! what's that?

(It was the crack of a revolver. No mistaking it, even by JOHN, *who has never been much of a hand with revolvers.)*

MARY. *(Frightened)* John!

(There is a scuffling noise outside the door. They look eagerly towards it. Then suddenly there is dead silence. The MAN IN THE BOWLER HAT *flicks some of his cigar ash onto the carpet—*MARY'S *carpet.)*

JOHN. Look!

(Very slowly the door begins to open. Through the

crack comes a long, sinuous hand. The door opens farther, and the hand is followed by a long, sinuous body. Still the MAN IN THE BOWLER HAT *says nothing. Then the door is closed, and leaning up against it, breathing rather quickly, is the* HERO, *in his hand a revolver.* JOHN *and* MARY *look at each other wonderingly.)*

JOHN. *(With a preliminary cough)* I—I beg your pardon?

HERO. *(Turning quickly, finger to his lips)* H'sh!

JOHN. *(Apologetically)* I beg your pardon!

(The HERO *listens anxiously at the door. Then, evidently reassured for the moment, he comes towards them.)*

HERO. *(To* JOHN*)* Quick, take this! *(He presses his revolver into* JOHN'S *hand.)*

JOHN. I—er—what do I—

HERO. *(To* MARY*)* And you! This! *(He takes another revolver from his hip pocket and presses it into* MARY'S *hand.)*

MARY. Thank you. Do we—

HERO. *(Sternly)* H'sh!

MARY. Oh, I beg your pardon.

HERO. Listen!

(They ALL *listen.* JOHN *and* MARY *have never listened so intently before, but to no purpose. They hear nothing.)*

JOHN. *(In a whisper)* What is it?

HERO. Nothing.

JOHN. Yes, that's what *I* heard.

HERO. Have you got a— *(He breaks off and broods.)*

MARY. A what?

HERO. *(Shaking his head)* No, it's too late now.

JOHN. *(To* MARY*)* Haven't we got one?

MARY. I ordered one on Saturday, but it hasn't come.

HERO. You wait here—that will be best. I shall be back in a moment.

JOHN. What do we do?

HERO. Listen. That's all. Listen.

JOHN. *(Eagerly)* Yes, yes.

HERO. I shall be back directly.

(Just as he is making for the window, the door opens and the HEROINE—*obviously—comes in. They stand gazing at each other.)*

HEROINE. Oh! *(But with a world of expression in it.)*

HERO. Oh! *(With even more expression.)*

HEROINE. My love!

HERO. My beautiful!

(They meet and are locked in an embrace.)

JOHN. *(To* MARY*)* I suppose they're engaged to be married.

MARY. Oh, I think they must be.

JOHN. They've evidently *met* before.

HERO. *(Lifting his head for a moment)* My Dolores! *(He bites her neck again.)*

JOHN. *(To* MARY*)* I think this must be both "How do you do" *and* "Goodbye."

MARY. *(Wistfully)* He is very good-looking.

JOHN. *(Casually)* Oh, do you think so? Now *she's* pretty, if you like.

MARY. *(Doubtfully)* Ye-es. Very bad style, of course.

JOHN. *(Indignantly)* My dear Mary—

HEROINE. *(To* HERO*)* Quick, quick, you must go!

HERO. Never—now that I have found you again.

HEROINE. Yes, yes! My father is hot upon your tracks. He will be here at any moment in his two-seater.

HERO. *(Turning pale)* Your father!

HEROINE. I walked on ahead to warn you. He has come for—IT!

JOHN. *(To* MARY*)* What on earth's IT?

HERO. *(Staggering)* IT!

HEROINE. Yes.

JOHN. *(To* MARY*)* Income-tax collector.

HERO. The Rajah's Ruby!

MARY. Oh, how exciting!

HEROINE. Yes, he knows you have it. He is determined to wrest it from you.

HERO. Never!

JOHN. Well done! Bravo! *(Offering his cigarette case)* Would you care for a— *(But the* HERO *spurns it.)*

HEROINE. There is no mischief he might not do, if once it were in his possession. Three prominent members of Society would be ruined, there would be another war in Mexico and the exchange value of the rouble would be seriously impaired. Promise me you will never give it up.

HERO. I promise.

HEROINE. I must go. I am betraying my father by coming here, but I love you.

JOHN. *(To* MARY*)* She does love him. I thought she did.

MARY. How could she help it?

HERO. I adore you!

JOHN. You see, he adores her too. It certainly looked like it.

MARY. I still don't think she's very good style.

HEROINE. Then—goodbye!

(They embrace again.)

JOHN. *(After a decent interval)* Excuse me, sir, but if you have a train to catch—I mean if your future father-in-law's two-seater is any good at all, oughtn't you to be—er—

HERO. *(Releasing* HEROINE*)* Goodbye! *(He conducts her to the door, gives her a last long lingering look, and lets her go.)*

MARY. *(To herself)* Pretty, of course, in a kind of way, but I must say I don't *like* that style.

(The HERO *comes out of his reverie and proceeds to business.)*

HERO. *(Briskly to* JOHN*)* You have those revolvers?

JOHN. Yes.

HERO. Then wait here, and listen. More than one life depends upon it.

JOHN. How many more?

HERO. If you hear the slightest noise—

JOHN. *(Eagerly)* Yes!

HERO. H'sh!

(He goes to the window, waits there listening for a moment, and then slips out. . . . JOHN *and* MARY *remain, their ears outstretched.)*

JOHN. *(With a start)* H'sh! What's that?

MARY. What was it, dear?

JOHN. I don't know.

MARY. It's so awkward when you don't quite know what you're listening *for.*

JOHN. H'sh! We were told to listen and we must listen. More than one life depends on it.

MARY. All right, dear.

(They continue to listen. A little weary of it, MARY *looks down the barrel of the revolver to see if she can see anything interesting.)*

JOHN. *(Observing her)* Don't do that! It's very dangerous to point a loaded revolver at yourself. If anything happened, it would be too late to say afterwards that you didn't mean it.

MARY. Very well, John— Oh, look!

(Again the door opens quickly, and a sinister gentleman in a fur coat inserts himself into the room. We recognize him at once as the CHIEF VILLAIN. *Very noiselessly, his back to* JOHN *and* MARY, *he creeps along the wall towards the window.)*

JOHN. *(In a whisper)* Father-in-law.

MARY. Do we— *(She indicates the revolver.)*

JOHN. *(Doubtfully)* I—I suppose— *(He raises his gun hesitatingly.)*

MARY. Oughtn't you to say something first?

JOHN. Yes—er— *(He clears his throat warningly)* Ahem! *(The* CHIEF VILLAIN *continues to creep towards the window)* You, sir!

MARY. *(Politely)* Do you want anything, or—or anything?

(The CHIEF VILLAIN *is now at the window.)*

JOHN. Just a moment, sir.

(The CHIEF VILLAIN *opens the window and steps out between the curtains.)*

MARY. Oh, he's gone!

JOHN. I call that very bad manners.

MARY. Do you think he'll come back?

JOHN. *(With determination)* I shall shoot him like a dog if he does. *(Waiving aside all protests)* Like a dog.

MARY. Yes, dear, perhaps that *would* be best.

JOHN. Look out, he's coming back.

(He raises his revolver as the door opens. Again the CHIEF VILLAIN *enters cautiously and creeps towards the window.)*

MARY. *(In a whisper)* Shoot!

JOHN. *(Awkwardly)* Er—I suppose it *is* the same man?

MARY. Yes, yes!

JOHN. I mean—it wouldn't be quite fair if— *(He coughs warningly)* Excuse me, sir!

(The CHIEF VILLAIN *is now at the window again.)*

MARY. Quick, before he goes!

JOHN. *(Raising his revolver nervously)* I ought to

tell you, sir— *(To* MARY*)* You know, I still think this is a different one.

(The CHIEF VILLAIN *again disappears through the window.)*

MARY. *(In great disappointment)* Oh, he's gone!

JOHN. *(Firmly)* It was a different one. The other one hadn't got a moustache.

MARY. He had, John. It was the same man, of course it was.

JOHN. Oh! Well, if I had known that, if I had only been certain of it, I should have shot him like a dog.

A VOICE. *(Which sounds like the* HERO'S*)* Help, help!

MARY. John, listen!

JOHN. I *am* listening.

A VOICE. He-e-elp!

MARY. Oughtn't we to do something?

JOHN. We *are* doing something. We're listening. That's what he told us to do.

A VOICE. Help!

JOHN. *(Listening)* That's the other man; the one who came in first.

MARY. The nice-looking one. Oh, John, we *must* do something.

JOHN. If he calls out again, I shall—I shall—do something. I shall take steps. I may even have to shoot somebody. But I will *not* have—

A VOICE. Quick, quick!

MARY. There!

JOHN. Er—was that the same voice?

MARY. *(Moving to the door)* Yes, of course it was. It sounded as if it were in the hall. Come along.

JOHN. Wait a moment. *(She turns round)* We must keep cool, Mary. We mustn't be impetuous. Just hold this a moment. *(He hands her his revolver.)*

MARY. *(Surprised)* Why, what—

JOHN. I shall take my coat off. *(He takes off his coat very slowly)* I'm going through with this. I'm not easily roused, but when once—

A VOICE. Help! Quick!

JOHN. *(Reassuringly)* All right, my man, all right. *(Very leisurely he rolls up his sleeves)* I'm not going to have this sort of thing going on in *my* house. I'm not going to have it. *(Doubtfully)* I don't think I need take my waistcoat off too. What do *you* think, Mary?

MARY. *(Impatiently)* No, dear, of course not, you look very nice.

JOHN. *(Very determined)* Now, then, let's have that revolver. *(She gives it to him)* I shall say "Hands up!" —very sharply, like that—*"Hands up!"*—and then if he doesn't put his hands up I shall—I shall say "Hands up!" again. That will show him that I'm not to be trifled with. Now, then, dear, are you ready?

MARY. *(Eagerly)* Yes!

JOHN. Then—

(But at that moment the LIGHTS go out.)

MARY. Oh!

JOHN. *(Annoyed)* Now, why did you do that, Mary?

MARY. I didn't do it, dear.

JOHN. Then who did?

MARY. I don't know. They just went out.

JOHN. Then I shall write to the company tomorrow and complain. I shall complain to the company about the lights, and I shall complain to the landlord about the way people go in and out of this house, and shriek and—

MARY. *(In alarm)* Oh!

JOHN. *Don't* do that! What is it?

MARY. I can feel somebody quite close to me.

JOHN. Well, that's me.

MARY. Not you, somebody else. . . . Oh! He touched me!

JOHN. *(Addressing the darkness)* Really, sir, I must ask you not to—

MARY. Listen! I can hear breathings all round me!

JOHN. Excuse me, sir, but do you mind *not* breathing all round my wife?

MARY. There! Now I can't hear anything.

JOHN. *(Complacently)* There you are, my dear. You

see what firmness does. I wasn't going to have *that* sort of thing going on in my house.

(The LIGHTS go up and reveal the HERO *gagged so that only his eyes are visible, and bound to a chair.)*

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MARY. *(Clinging to her husband)* Oh, John!

JOHN. *(With sudden desperate bravery)* Hands up! *(He levels his revolver.)*

MARY. Don't be silly, how can he?

JOHN. All right, dear, I was only practising. *(He blows a speck of dust off his revolver, and holds it up to the light again)* Yes, it's quite a handy little fellow. I think I shall be able to do some business with this all right.

MARY. Poor fellow! I wonder who it is.

(The HERO *tries to speak with his eyes and movements of the head.)*

JOHN. He wants something. Perhaps it's the evening paper. *(He makes a movement towards it.)*

MARY. Listen!

(The HERO *begins to tap with his feet.)*

JOHN. He's signalling something.

MARY. Dots and dashes!

JOHN. That's the Morse Code, that's what that is. Where's my dictionary? *(He fetches it hastily and begins to turn over the pages)*

MARY. Quick, dear!

JOHN. *(Reading)* Here we are. "1. Morse—The walrus." *(Looking at the* HERO*)* No, that must be wrong. Ah, this is better. "2. Morse code signalling of telegraph operators—as 'He sends a good morse.'"

MARY. Well? What does it say?

JOHN. Nothing. That's all. Then we come to "Morsel—a small piece of food, a mouthful, a bite. Also a small meal."

MARY. *(Brilliantly)* A mouthful! That's what he means! He wants the gag taken out of his mouth. *(She goes to him.)*

JOHN. That's very clever of you, Mary. I should never have thought of that.

MARY. *(Untying the gag)* There! . . . Why, it's the man who came in first, the nice-looking one!

JOHN. Yes, he *said* he was coming back.

(Before the HERO *can express his thanks—if that is what he wants to express—the* CHIEF VILLAIN, *accompanied by a* BAD MAN, *comes in.* JOHN *and* MARY *instinctively retreat.)*

CHIEF VILLAIN. *(Sardonically)* Ha!

JOHN. *(Politely)* Ha to you, sir. *(The* CHIEF VILLAIN *fixes* JOHN *with a terrible eye. Nervously to* MARY*)* Say "Ha!" to the gentleman, dear.

MARY. *(Faintly)* Ha!

CHIEF VILLAIN. And what the Mephistopheles are *you* doing here?

JOHN. *(To* MARY*)* What *are* we doing here?

MARY. *(Bravely)* This is our house.

JOHN. Yes, this is *our* house.

CHIEF VILLAIN. Then siddown! (JOHN *sits down meekly)* Is this your wife?

JOHN. Yes. *(Making the introduction)* Er—my wife —er—Mr.—er—the gentleman.

CHIEF VILLAIN. Then tell her to siddown too.

JOHN. *(To* MARY*)* He wants you to siddown.

(She does so.)

CHIEF VILLAIN. That's better. *(To* BAD MAN*)* Just take their guns off 'em.

BAD MAN. *(Taking the guns)* Do you want them tied up or gagged or anything?

CHIEF VILLAIN. No, they're not worth it.

JOHN. *(Humbly)* Thank you.

CHIEF VILLAIN. Now, then, to business. *(To* HERO*)* Where's the Rajah's ruby?

HERO. *(Firmly)* I shan't tell you.

CHIEF VILLAIN. You won't?

HERO. I won't.

CHIEF VILLAIN. That's awkward. *(After much thought)* You absolutely refuse to?

HERO. I absolutely refuse to.

CHIEF VILLAIN. Ha! *(To* BAD MAN*)* Torture the prisoner.

BAD MAN. *(Cheerfully)* Right you are, governor. *(He feels on the lapel of his coat and then says to* MARY*)* Could you oblige me with the loan of a pin, Mum?

MARY. I don't think— *(Finding one)* Here you are.

BAD MAN. Thanks. *(He advances threateningly upon the prisoner.)*

CHIEF VILLAIN. Wait! *(To* HERO*)* Before proceeding to extremities, I will give you one more chance. Where is the Rujah's Raby?

BAD MAN. You mean the Rabah's Rujy, don't you, governor?

CHIEF VILLAIN. That's what I said.

JOHN. *(Wishing to help)* You *said* the Rubah's Rajy, but I think you meant the rhubarb's—

CHIEF VILLAIN. Silence! *(To* HERO*)* I ask you again —where is the Ruj—I mean where is the Rab— Well, anyhow, where *is* it?

HERO. I won't tell you.

CHIEF VILLAIN. Proceed, Mr. Smithers.

BAD MAN. Well, you've asked for it, Mate. *(He pushes the pin into the* HERO'S *arm.)*

HERO. Ow!

MARY. Oh, poor fellow!

CHIEF VILLAIN. Silence! Where is— *(The* HERO *shakes his head)* Torture him again, Mr. Smithers.

HERO. No, no! Mercy! I'll tell you.

JOHN. *(Indignantly)* Oh, I say!

BAD MAN. Shall I just give him another one for luck, governor?

HERO. Certainly not!

JOHN. *(To* MARY*)* Personally I think he should have held out much longer.

CHIEF VILLAIN. Very well, then. Where is the Rajah's Ruby?

HERO. In the cloakroom of Waterloo Station. In a hat box.

CHIEF VILLAIN. *(Doubtfully)* In the cloakroom at Waterloo Station, you say?

HERO. Yes. In a hat box. Now release me.

CHIEF VILLAIN. How do I know it's there?

HERO. Well, how do *I* know?

CHIEF VILLAIN. True. *(Holding out his hand)* Well, give me the ticket for it.

HERO. I haven't got it.

BAD MAN. Now, then, none of that.

HERO. I haven't really.

JOHN. I don't think he'd say he *hadn't* got it if he *had* got it. Do you, Mary?

MARY. Oh, I'm sure he wouldn't.

CHIEF VILLAIN. Silence! *(To* HERO*)* Where is the ticket?

HERO. In the cloakroom of Paddington Station. In a hat box.

CHIEF VILLAIN. The same hat box?

HERO. Of course not. The other one was at Waterloo Station.

CHIEF VILLAIN. Well, then, where's the ticket for the hat box in the Paddington cloakroom?

HERO. In the cloakroom at Charing Cross. In a hat box.

CHIEF VILLAIN. *(Annoyed)* Look here, how many hat boxes have you got?

HERO. Lots.

CHIEF VILLAIN. Oh! Now let's get this straight. You say that the Rajah's Ruby is in a hat box in the cloakroom at Paddington—

HERO. Waterloo.

CHIEF VILLAIN. Waterloo; and that the ticket for that hat box is in a hat box in the cloakroom at Euston—

HERO. Paddington.

CHIEF VILLAIN. Paddington; and that the ticket for

this ticket, which is in a hat box at Paddington, for the Ruby which is in a hat box at King's Cross—

BAD MAN. Euston.

JOHN. *(Tentatively)* St. Pancras?

MARY. Earl's Court?

CHIEF VILLAIN. *(Angrily)* Oh, shut up! The ticket for this ticket, which is in a hat box at Paddington, for the Ruby which is in a hat box at—at—

HERO. Waterloo.

CHIEF VILLAIN. Waterloo, thank you. This ticket is in a hat box at—er—

JOHN. *(With decision)* St. Pancras.

MARY. *(Equally certain)* Earl's Court.

CHIEF VILLAIN. *Shut up!* In a hat box at—

HERO. Charing Cross.

CHIEF VILLAIN. Exactly. *(Triumphantly)* Then give me the ticket!

HERO. Which one?

CHIEF VILLAIN. *(Uneasily)* The one we're talking about.

JOHN. *(Helpfully)* The St. Pancras one.

MARY. The Earl's Court one.

CHIEF VILLAIN. *(In a fury) Will* you shut up? *(To* HERO*)* Now listen. *(Very slowly and with an enormous effort of concentration)* I want the ticket for the hat box at Charing Cross, which contains the ticket for the hat box at— (JOHN'S *lips indicate "St. Pancras" to* MARY, *whose own seem to express a preference for Earl's Court. The* VILLAIN *gives them one look and goes on firmly)* —at Paddington, which contains the ticket for the hat box at Waterloo, which contains the Rajah's Ruby. *(Proudly)* There!

HERO. I beg your pardon?

CHIEF VILLAIN. *(Violently)* I will *not* say it again! Give me the ticket!

HERO. *(Sadly)* I haven't got it.

CHIEF VILLAIN. *(In an awestruck whisper)* You haven't got it?

HERO. No.

CHIEF VILLAIN. *(After several vain attempts to speak)* Where is it?

HERO. In the cloakroom at Victoria Station.

CHIEF VILLAIN. *(Moistening his lips and speaking faintly)* Not—not in a hat box?

HERO. Yes.

CHIEF VILLAIN. *(Without much hope)* And the ticket for that?

HERO. In the cloakroom at Euston.

CHIEF VILLAIN. *(Quite broken up)* Also in a hat box?

HERO. Yes.

CHIEF VILLAIN. How much longer do we go on?

HERO. *(Cheerfully)* Oh, a long time yet.

CHIEF VILLAIN. *(To* BAD MAN*)* How many London stations are there?

JOHN. Well, there's St. Pancras, and—

MARY. Earl's Court—

BAD MAN. About twenty big ones, governor.

CHIEF VILLAIN. Twenty! *(To* HERO*)* And what do we do when we've gone through the lot?

HERO. Then we go all round them again.

CHIEF VILLAIN. *(Anxiously)* And—and so on?

HERO. And so on.

CHIEF VILLAIN. *(His hand to his head)* This is terrible. I must think. *(To* BAD MAN*)* Just torture him again while I think.

BAD MAN. *(Cheerfully)* Right you are, governor. *(He approaches his victim.)*

HERO. *(Uneasily)* I say, look here!

JOHN. I don't think it's quite fair, you know—

MARY. *(Suddenly)* Give me back my pin!

BAD MAN. Must obey orders, gentlemen. *(Coaxingly to* HERO*)* Just a little way in. *(Indicating with his fingers)* That much.

JOHN. *(To* MARY*)* I think perhaps "that much" wouldn't matter. What do—

CHIEF VILLAIN. *(Triumphantly)* I've got it!

(He rises with an air, the problem solved. They ALL *look at him.)*

JOHN. What?

CHIEF VILLAIN. *(Impressively to* HERO*)* There is somewhere—logically, there must be somewhere—a final, an ultimate hat box.

JOHN. By Jove! That's true!

HERO. Yes.

BAD MAN. *(Scratching his head)* I don't see it.

CHIEF VILLAIN. Then—where *is* that hat box?

JOHN. *(Cheerfully)* St. Pancras.

MARY. Earl's Court.

CHIEF VILLAIN. Shut up! *(To* HERO*)* Where is that hat box?

HERO. In the cloakroom at Charing Cross.

CHIEF VILLAIN. Ah! *(He holds out his hand)* Then give me the ticket for it.

BAD MAN. *(Threateningly)* Come on now! The ticket!

HERO. *(Shaking his head sadly)* I can't.

CHIEF VILLAIN. *(Almost inarticulate with emotion)* You don't mean to say you've—lost—it?

HERO. *(In a whisper, with bowed head)* I've lost it.

(With a terrible shriek the CHIEF VILLAIN *falls back fainting into the arms of the* BAD MAN. *Instinctively* JOHN *and* MARY *embrace, sobbing to each other, "He's lost it!" The* HEROINE *rushes in, crying, "My love, you've lost it!" and puts her arms round the* HERO. *Only the* MAN IN THE BOWLER HAT *remains unmoved. Slowly he removes the cigar from his mouth and speaks.)*

BOWLER HAT. Yes. . . . That's all right. . . . Just a bit ragged still. . . . We'll take it again at eleven tomorrow . . . Second Act, please.

(And so the rehearsal goes on.)

THE FLATTERING WORD

Comedy. 1 act. By George Kelly. 2 males, 3 females. Interior. Modern costumes. 30 minutes.

Mrs. Mary Zooker knew Tesh before he was a distinguished actor. Now Tesh is in town again and Mary is married to a pompous pastor. Tesh would like to have Mary see his performance that evening, but Mary is convinced that the Pastor, with all his prejudices against the theatre, will never consent to take her. Mary, however, does not take into account the power of the "flattering word." Highly recommended.

(Royalty, $10.00.) Price, 40 cents.

SMARTY'S PARTY

Drama. 1 act. By George Kelly. 1 male, 3 females. Interior. Modern costumes. 25 minutes.

When Charles brings his flapper wife home to meet his aristocratic mother, the mother is so deeply hurt that she tells Charles the truth: he is not her son. Charles is forced to take up an entirely new life with the grasping family of the girl. Human emotions are probed with theatrical effectiveness.

(Royalty, $10.00.) Price, 40 cents.

THE WEAK SPOT

Comedy. 1 act. By George Kelly. 1 male, 2 females. Interior. Modern costumes. 25 minutes.

Mr. West thinks the superstitions of Mrs. West are quite, quite silly. An old peddler woman reads the cards for Mrs. West, and when coincidence proves her predictions not too far from the truth, Mr. West finds himself indulging in his wife's beliefs—not that he would ever admit it to her. Highly amusing.

(Royalty, $10.00.) Price, 40 cents.

POOR AUBREY

Comedy. 1 act. By George Kelly. 1 male, 3 females. Interior. Modern costumes. 30 minutes.

When Amy Piper receives a visit from an old girl friend, her husband, Aubrey, tries desperately to impress the visitor. He tells impressive tales of his wealth, his home, his car—only to have his mother-in-law burst his balloon in comic fashion.

(Royalty, $10.00.) Price, 40 cents.

OH, JOHNNY!

Comedy. 1 act. By John Randall. 3 males, 4 females. Interior. Modern costumes. 35 minutes.

Johnny Turner, "baby" of the family, has spent most of his years learning how to protect himself from older brother Dick and sister Alice and, at fourteen, he's quite an expert in this field. On the night of the play, Johnny's father is running a dance at the Country Club for the benefit of the USO. Also on this night, Alice and Dick have conspired to deprive Johnny of his most cherished possession, an adolescent frog. Johnny decides to get revenge, and succeeds—in ample measure—almost wrecking the USO dance in the process.

(Royalty, $5.00.) Price, 35 cents.

LIFE WITH MOTHER

Comedy. 1 act. By Babette Hughes. 4 females. Interior. Modern costumes. 25 minutes.

Susan Grey must be added to the list of flighty, delightful women who make the wheels of modern comedy go around. Susan bullies her daughter, her maid, and her husband's secretary, and their discomfiture is equalled only by the amusement of the audience. She also carries on absurd telephone conversations, blows soap bubbles and teaches her daughter how to make up. This is an unconventional, sparkling sketch, with genuinely witty dialogue and expert characterizations, ideal for women's clubs and colleges. Well adapted to drawing-room (Penthouse style) presentation.

(Royalty, $5.00.) Price, 35 cents.

WHY THE CHIMES RANG

Fantasy. 1 act. By Elizabeth McFadden from the story by Raymond MacDonald Alden. 3 males, 1 female, extras.

The play deals with the divine beauty of charity, and, while appropriate for any ordinary occasion of school or Sunday-school, it is especially fitted for Christmas time. Many educators of recent years are trying to emphasize the Christ story rather than the Santa Claus legend in their Christmas entertainments, and this play is in every respect an ideal choice for such a purpose. The play has had the advantage of numerous productions, and the results of this experience have been set forth in an appendix, giving detailed data regarding the scenery, lighting, costumes, properties and music.

(Royalty, $5.00.) Price, 35 cents.

ROMANCE COMES TO WILLIE PARKER

Comedy. 3 acts. By Tom Taggart. 6 males, 6 females (extras). Interior. Modern costumes.

Thomas Giddings is an irascible, hot-tempered farmer. Mother Giddings is a self-effacing woman who bows to his every whim. His oldest daughter, Beatrice, is married to Clarence Callendar, an eccentric young man whose impractical interest in "inventing" keeps him from holding a job. Marian is a senior in the Consolidated High School. Dink divides his time between ice-skating and eating raisins. Willie Parker is the boy who lives on the next farm. He has always known the Giddings, and taken them—especially Marian—for granted. So when good-looking Eugene Nelson comes along, she is only too happy to accept his invitations. Between his romance with Marian, the invention, and his squabbling with her father, Willie has his troubles, and it is the hilarious way in which he solves them which furnishes the background for this engaging play for high schools, Granges, 4-H clubs, and churches.

(Royalty, $10.00.) Price, 50 cents.

BOARDING SCHOOL

Comedy. 3 acts. By James Worthing. 6 males, 12 females. Interior. Modern costumes.

The central character is Phoebe Prince, publicized as "The Little Orphan Princess," an heiress of the famous Prince tobacco fortune. Phoebe is shifted from a Paris convent by her aunt and guardian, Mrs. Bettincourt, and is enrolled at Briarton. She is immediately followed by Count Andre de Maupin, a young French nobleman and fortune hunter, who plans an elopement. Meanwhile, Phoebe succeeds in making herself thoroughly unpopular with the other girls, and is told off by them in a thrilling and hilarious "initiation" scene. This helps her make up her mind to elope with the Count, and there is consternation at Briarton. But Phoebe is rescued from the grasping hands of the Count by Wilbur Timkins, the young school electrician and as droll a hero as you've ever encountered. There are a number of side plots, concerning the other students at Briarton, and comedy galore supplied by Kid Kennedy, ex-middleweight champ and Phoebe's bodyguard. This is an exceptionally fine play for high schools and other young groups, for the cast is predominantly a young one.

(Royalty, $10.00.) Price, 50 cents.